

Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable with Meg O'Grady, Acting Program Manager, Military Spouse Employment Partnership, Department of Defense Captain Bradley Cooper, Executive Director, Joining Forces

Location: Via Teleconference

Subject: Veteran and Military Spouse Employment Initiatives

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LIEUTENANT TIFFANI WALKER (Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs): So I'd like to welcome you all, to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, August 22nd, 2012. My name is Lieutenant Tiffani Walker, and I'm with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating your call today.

Today we're honored to have as our guest Ms. Meg O'Grady. She's the acting program manager of the DOD's Military Spouse Employment Partnership. The round table follows a major announcement that the first lady has just made on veteran and military spouse employment at Naval Station Mayport, Florida. We'll discuss current veteran and military spouse employment initiatives' successes to date and goals for the future.

A note to our bloggers on the line today: Please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question, respect our guest's time and keep your questions succinct and to the point.

I'll now turn it over to Ms. O'Grady to make any opening statements she may have.

MEG O'GRADY: Thank you, Lieutenant Walker. I'm so happy to be calling in from Mayport, where I just did see the first lady make the announcement that we have hired 125,000 veterans and military spouses. Over 2,000 companies have joined the Joining Forces initiative. And so we were thrilled to be there today to see the announcement. And for military spouse employment in particular, we are looking to hire 50,000 military spouses over the next three years through our Military Spouse Employment Partnership. So I'm happy to join you today, and I'm happy to take your questions.

LT. WALKER: OK, we're going to get started in the order in which everyone appeared on the line. So Dale, you're first. Go ahead, sir.

Q: Good afternoon, Meg. This is Dale Kissinger from militaryavenue.com. I was on the last round table when you participated, I believe in July, and it was talking about the job fair at Lewis-McChord on July 24th. I -- you just had this very exciting announcement from the first lady. I was wondering what kind of success do you see at these job fairs? Do you see a lot of hiring going on at the job fairs that Joining Forces and others are coordinating?

MS. O'GRADY: Yes, Dale, that's a great question. We actually -- from the military spouse perspective, we actually hired 20 military spouses on the spot at Joint Base Lewis-McChord with three of our military spouse employment partners, one of whom was Amazon. So we are seeing great success with the Hiring Our Heroes career fairs. The great thing about the Hiring Our Heroes career fairs is that the employers do not have to pay a fee. They only have to show up with jobs -- (chuckles) -- and they have to have jobs available to hire that day when they show up at the career fair. And so we're seeing great success.

The other thing that I think really makes Hiring Our Heroes a success for military spouses is that during the military spouse events for Hiring Our Heroes, we do have workshops available through the Military Spouse Business Alliance that are -- it's a consortium of nonprofits who have come together to provide military spouses with great information and resources from mentoring to resume development to interview skills. And we think that that is one of the things that makes those career fairs a success for our military spouses.

So yes, we are seeing success. And at Joint Base Lewis-McChord for sure, 20 spouses walked away with a job that day. So we're very, very happy about that.

Q: Thank you very much.

LT. WALKER: All right. Thanks, Meg and Dale.

Up next is Karen Golden from MOAA. Go ahead.

Q: Good afternoon. This is Karen Golden. And we're very excited to hear about the first lady's announcement today. And I'd like a little more information, Meg, if you can, on the steps the Military Spouse Employment Partnership is going to take to foster hiring those 50,000 spouses over the next three years. What is -- what is the steps or the plan to achieve that goal?

MS. O'GRADY: OK, great. Good to hear from you. And we are actually -- as you know, we are in our -- in our -- we're just at the beginning here. Since June 29th of last year, of 2011, we have hired over 27,000 military spouses. And we have over doubled the number of partners that we have in the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. So there are -- there are quite a few things that we're looking forward to as we look to that 50,000 goal. And one of them is to, one, increase the number of partners. As you know, right now we have 129 partners in the partnership. We are looking to expand the partnership from the national level out to the regional level.

And so we know that over the last year we've had much interest from smaller and regional local businesses who have stepped up and said, we want to hire military spouses too, but we're not a large company. We may not have a global footprint, but we're looking to hire military spouses.

How can we do that? And one of the things that we're doing is fostering that connection with the region with our armed services employment personnel in that region so that they can hold hands with that regional partner and say, we want to hire military spouses. How can we do it, particularly in this area? So the regional partnership is one of the things that we're really looking forward to.

We're continuing to promote mentoring both for military spouses through our e-mentoring platform, MilSpouse eMentoring, and also through our partner-to-partner mentoring. So when we induct approximately 30 new partners in November here in Washington, D.C., we plan to have an orientation for those partners as part of the education process so that they understand the challenges that military spouses have. And after that orientation, they will shake hands with their enduring partner, someone who has been a partner with the partnership for at least a year. And that partner will become their mentor.

So we had a partner meeting in May of this year. And you know, one of our partners stood up and said, you know, we may be competitors outside of this room. But in this room today we all have one mission, and that's to hire military spouses. And so the partners are very excited to mentor each other and to show them the best practices that they have that not only hire military spouses but actually increase their bottom line.

So those are a few of the things that we're looking towards, along with expanding our partnerships not just with corporate America but with those partners who can assist military spouses in employment, such as MOAA. Our nonprofit partnerships with military service organizations are invaluable to us as you all advocate and provide resources and tools for military spouses.

So those are some of the things we're looking forward to, along with probably 10 or 12 other things that I said -- (chuckles) -- right now.

Q: Great, thank you.

MS. O'GRADY: You're very welcome.

LT. WALKER: All right, thank you both.

Katherine (sp), you're up next.

Q: Hi. Actually, my same question was about regional employers, and you just answered it, so I'm all set.

LT. WALKER: OK. Danny (sp), are you still on the line?

MS. : Yes. No questions from either. I just called to listen in.

LT. WALKER: OK. Then Katie, you're up next.

Q: Hi, Meg. Katie Savant, from the National Military Family Association.

MS. O'GRADY: Hi, Katie. Great to hear from you.

Q: Yes, you -- great to speak with you as well. I did have a question. Is the Military Spouse Employment Partnership also going to focus on facilitating the transfer of jobs from military spouses as they move from location to location?

MS. O'GRADY: Absolutely. That's a great question. And one of the things that the first lady actually talked about today, right now we have 26 states who have signed on to facilitate the transfer of licensure and certification for military spouses. And we're looking to work with the 24 other states to find solutions so that military spouses do not have to fight through the red tape or pay additional fees, take additional tests or certifications in order to work in there, in the professions that they love as they move with their service member.

So within military community and family policy, of which the Military Spouse Employment Partnership is a part, we actually have a group of state liaisons who are out in the United States working with each state legislature in order to help them facilitate legislation that will assist military spouses with the transfer of their licensure and certifications.

LT. WALKER: Katie, are you good or do you have a follow-up?

Q: Meg, that's -- that is very helpful for spouses who have licenses. What about a spouse who is just moving and not necessarily licensed, but wants to be able to keep her job or continue to work with an employer that's part of the partnership? Will there be any facilitation that way to help them maintain that job?

MS. O'GRADY: Yes, absolutely. The portability is a huge goal for the partnership. And so when the partners sign on, they actually do commit to providing the portable careers.

As we have larger corporations and groups, we are actually looking at the statistics or the data as to how many military spouses actually are not only relocated within their organizations but are promoted as well within their organization. And for those partners who do not necessarily have, say, a branch or a part of their organization in a place where a military spouse is moving, then we have begun to create through the partnership industry and regional networks.

So for instance, if a spouse is working for Navy Federal Credit Union in Mayport, Florida, and she happens to move to Texas, and there may or may not be a Navy Federal Credit Union branch available for her, we have a partnership -- or within the partnership, a network of banking and finance industry partners who can look and say, well, we have -- we may not have Navy Federal Credit Union, but we have Fort Hood National Bank. And Navy Federal Credit Union will recommend that spouse, and then we'll be able to facilitate that, either through our MSEP portal or just through resume sharing. And we have found already that several of our partners have highlighted that resume sharing among them is one of the best benefits of the partnerships. So we're looking to formalize that process a bit more so that we can help facilitate that transfer and portability.

Q: That's great. Thank you, Meg.

MS. O'GRADY: You're welcome.

CAPTAIN BRADLEY COOPER: Hey, Meg? It's Brad. I'm able to hop in here for about five minutes if there's no -- (inaudible) -- but it sounds like things are going great.

LT. WALKER: The wonderful Brad (on the floor ?).

CAPT. COOPER: Well, good. Hey, I just -- I just wanted to quickly thank everyone for joining, and Meg, for all your great work and leadership at the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. I mean, it really is, you know, the signature program for military spouses that we have and -- a lot to be proud of. Clearly a lot more work that could be done, but we really appreciate all your involvement.

And for the -- for the broader group, I just wanted to, you know, reiterate, you know, the highlights of today's announcement, which was -- you know, comes in a couple forms. First, it's a -- it's a signal of what can be achieved when we collectively focus on a goal. And in this case, it's (better than ?) spouse -- (inaudible) -- and having 125,000 hires behind us is wonderful.

But of course, there is much more work to be done in the commitment of companies to hire another quarter million veterans and spouses with 50,000 of those being military spouses I think really points to the desire and recognition to bring talented people into your company. And, you know, for us at the more strategic level, it also is we want this to be sustaining. You know, this is -- never been about being a flash in the pan. This is about an effort that is over the long haul. And we've tried to put measures in place (that have done that ?). I think this is a good example.

With that, I'd be more than happy to take a minute or two -- and I apologize for just kind of swooping in here, but we're still down here in -- (inaudible) -- Naval Station Mayport and have a couple of minutes. So over to Meg or whomever is best to answer a couple of questions if they want.

LT. WALKER: Great. This is Lieutenant Walker, sir. Thank you for coming in. I appreciate your help, sir. The next blogger that we have online is actually AnnaMaria. She's appearing on behalf of Blue Star Families. And she's up next. AnnaMaria?

Q: Hey, Brad. How are you?

CAPT. COOPER: Hey. Good. Long time, no chat.

Q: I know, right? You guys have been busy, obviously. I just had a --

CAPT. COOPER: Been great. Yeah, it's been great.

Q: Oh, good. I'm glad. I had actually two quick questions. One of them kind of came from a question that was asked earlier about the licensing. And now that there are 26 states that are

signed up for this kind of licensing exchange, I guess, is there any feedback yet on how that's going for spouses? Has that actually been implemented? Has it -- do we have any issues, successes? Obviously, it's a work in progress.

CAPT. COOPER: Yeah, I think it's -- you know, all of the above. Sort of -- a couple of states that already had legislation in place. You know, you have a lot of good examples of -- I met a nurse here in Mayport, you know, just 45 minutes ago who said she had absolutely no -- she moved here earlier this year -- Florida was a state that had existing legislation and she had no problem for the first time. Terrific.

Almost all the other states who are new, their legislation literally is just in place this summer. So the bill -- you know, they've just thrown enough -- it hasn't been around long enough to get a whole lot of feedback. I did get feedback from a spouse in Virginia who's also a nurse who said normally, she goes through the two or three-month process of getting her license, and she just got it last week. And it took two or three weeks, and a lot of that was on -- you know, on her because it took a little bit more time.

So I think we've clearly made progress, but like other things that we do, you know, we'll take feedback and we'll adjust as we move forward. And there's no doubt in my mind this fall we'll -- you know, we'll huddle and see what the next -- what we can do to help both inspire the 24 states, capture some lessons learned and apply them because that will always be the case, and I think it's healthy to get that good feedback of where things are going well, where can we improve.

Q: Yeah, that's great. That's really cool that it's already having a positive effect.

And then my next is a little bit different, just about some of the spouses that I interact with and, you know, myself as well, kind of looking toward being self-employed or starting our own businesses that can be transported. Is there a piece of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership that's going to focus on that, or are we really just focusing here on getting spouses jobs with larger established companies?

CAPT. COOPER: Yeah -- no, that's a great question. It's both. You know, we have deliberately, you know, done things with telework jobs, because that appeals to some folks. We have deliberately worked in spouse licensing, because that appeals and is necessary for others. And we have deliberately worked with, you know, big companies and middle-sized companies because that appeals to a third group.

I do think there is this fourth component of, you know, entrepreneurship, start-ups, small business. There's a lot more that can be done there, whether you're working as an independent agent owning your small business or you're physically buying the facility. There are a couple companies out there who already do good work in this, and we're looking to mature those relationships. But I think the overall subject of entrepreneurialism is one that we're going to look to to move forward in the next, you know, three to six months. It's ripe for moving forward.

LT. WALKER: OK, thank you, Captain Cooper, and thank you for your good questions, AnnaMaria.

Up next we have Dale, if you have any further questions.

Q: I do. I just saw a tweet from Joining Forces that said that the first lady saw a 20 percent lower unemployment rate for veterans over the last year. Do we have a similar number for military spouses? Do we know what the percentage of reduction is, or if it has been reduced?

CAPT. COOPER: We know for a fact that it's come down. We don't know exactly how much. And for (a lot of ?) reasons, it's just -- it's difficult from a data-gathering standpoint to identify military spouse population. It makes it even more difficult if a spouse elects to work or not work, you know, and that factors in the unemployment rate.

So what we do know, you know, from talking to leaders of the Council of Economic Advisers, the National Economic Council, is that it's a lower (in aggregate ?). We don't have -- you know, we don't have that number with great precision.

Q: OK, because I had seen earlier a number -- and I don't even remember where it came from -- it was at 26 percent for spouses, and we believe that's down now.

CAPT. COOPER: We can definitively say that's down. We just can't tell you, you know, to what level.

Q: OK. Thank you, sir.

CAPT. COOPER: Yeah, great question. That's an absolute fact that we know it's down, that -- the number moves around, but I think it's another one of those things that we want to try to get our arms around of where exactly are we, and it's just going to take a little time.

And I think maybe I can do one more question and then I'm going to get the hook and turn it back over to Meg, who's probably done even greater things in this call.

LT. WALKER: OK. Karen, you're up next. Do you have another question?

Q: Sure. Good afternoon, Captain Cooper. This is Karen Golden from MOAA. Thank you for joining the call. I just have a follow-up question on something you said that I think is very important to military spouses -- I know that military spouses, myself included. Can you just address even one piece of how Joining Forces is going to make this something that's sustainable, that is, as you said, not kind of like a flash, but it's going to be ongoing -- this is going to be a continual process? Could you just give us, like, one bit?

CAPT. COOPER: Yeah. I could give five or six good examples.

Q: Go ahead.

CAPT. COOPER: One of the -- one of them -- you know, in no particular order -- is cementing a spouse employment partnership in the government agency, the Department of Defense in this case, that's going to -- that's -- you know, that can run with this and exercise oversight. You know, that means that this program can be around for as long as it continues to bear positive results.

Let's talk health care. We've very deliberately worked with nursing schools and medical schools to get them to adopt curriculum on veteran and military family health care starting this fall, so that that curriculum is training doctors and nurses and now social workers for years and decades to come. You know, Joining Forces will have been a wonderful piece to kick it off, but ostensibly, you know, we're really planting a seed in that regard that blooms for decades.

Overall in employment, we're looking shape a very closer relationship with the Department of Commerce. Obviously the Department of Commerce has tens of thousands of business connections. And we're looking to kind of mature that relationship so that they assume a critical role in connecting with employers and connecting employers to veterans. They're very interested in doing that.

And those -- I mean, those are, you know, four pretty tangible examples of we're in this for the long haul. And you know, I guess, I can give this point is, rather than doing something less or doing something different with outside something, hey, the goal is to get states to do -- to implement laws, because that's the last thing in this legislation. And it's around until there's a better idea to mature a law to the next level. So I think those -- you know, those are five or six examples that all point to long term.

Q: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

CAPT. COOPER: OK, great. And Meg and team, I'm sorry I'm going to have to go here, but wonderful chatting. And you know, if someone has a follow-up you can connect either through Meg or anybody else on the call. I'd be more than happy to follow-up with you.

LT. WALKER: OK. Thanks, Captain Cooper.

MS. O'GRADY: Great, thank you.

CAPT. COOPER: Hey thanks, Meg. Thanks, everybody. We appreciate the great support and chatting. Bye-bye.

LT. WALKER: All right. I'll turn the floor back over to Ms. O'Grady. Meg, if you have any other statements I think we've gone around to everybody except Katie. And Katie, if you'd like to ask another question and then we'll wrap up today's call.

Q: Oh, no further questions for me, thank you.

LT. WALKER: OK. Meg, I'll turn it over to you for any closing statements that you might have.

MS. O'GRADY: OK, thank you. I -- you know, I think the thing that we want you to take away from today is that we are -- we are absolutely making progress. And I love what Cooper said about planting the seeds and having them bloom for decades. We are absolutely looking at these programs to create sustainability for military spouses as they move throughout their service member's career, whether that's three years or 30 years.

And we have all kinds of initiatives and ways to evolve, from entrepreneurship to regional partnerships, to expanding the number of partners and continuing to educate both our partners and communities on the challenges that military spouses and veterans face as the -- as they move through their careers and as they transition into the civilian world.

So we're very happy that you're spreading the word. For all of you who are veterans and military spouses yourselves, I want to thank you and honor your service and sacrifice. And really looking forward to continuing to work with you as we move the programs forward. Thank you.

LT. WALKER: All right. Thanks, Meg. Today's program will be available online at dodlive.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with source documents such as this audio file and a print transcript. Those products will start rolling in either late tonight or early tomorrow, and should be up before the weekend.

Again, everyone, thank you for your participation. This concludes today's event, but if you have any follow-on questions or you're curious about products, please go ahead and email me or the email that you received from the RSVP and we can get you set up with links or directs to resources.

Feel free to disconnect at this time.

Thank you, ladies, and goodbye.

Q: Thank you, Tiffany.

Q: Thanks, Tiffany.

Q: Thanks, Tiffany.

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